

Peer Reviews of FFY06 Homeland Security Grants

Report provided, 4-20-06

These are generic comments from the two Washington State representatives who participated in the federal FY06 Homeland Security Grant Program application review process. There were 110 peer reviewers from state and local jurisdictions. Arel Solie, Washington State Emergency Management Division (EMD) and Tom Symonds, Pierce County were our state representatives. It was a huge amount of work for both of these people.

Three states were reviewed by Arel Solie. She looked at states with and without UASI. A total of six applications were reviewed. Tom Symonds had one state and five UASIs. They worked ten hour days for eleven days straight in the initial paper review process. There was a numeric grade given to each question, usually based on a scale between 1-5. Additionally, reviewers were required to provide comments on responses to each question graded. Upon completion of the initial review process, the panels convened at the National Fire Training Academy in Emmitsburg, MD for a week-long panel discussion regarding the applications. Having state and local reviewers assist was critical since federal reviewers didn't always have state and local experience or perspectives. 17 panels with seven reviewers each. There was a facilitator for each group. Each of the seven people looked at the six investment justifications. The panels had a cross section of experiences and backgrounds. This diversity of experience on the panels helped with scoring.

Both of our state representatives felt that the process was fair and impartial within the scope of the evaluations.

General observations: There were common issues addressed across State and UASI requests, e.g., resource typing for NIMS, interoperable communications, medical surge and mass prophylaxis. It was pretty clear that, in some states, the medical people and emergency managers are not talking to one another. Our UASI application (King, Pierce, Snohomish Counties, and cities of Seattle and Bellevue) appears to be head and shoulders above the other UASI applications that they reviewed. Written comments were also required for each question reviewed. It was very apparent when organizations didn't know what they wanted to do and why.

Some UASI jurisdictions stated in their applications that they don't work with their state's and do not get information from their SAA. It appears that they look at themselves as rivals, states versus UASI jurisdictions. Having coordinated applications between the State and UASI is key. Next year we will spend more time ensuring that the state and UASI applications are totally congruent and complementary. Some states really didn't do an enhancement plan. Some didn't

have their investment justifications tied to their enhancement plan. Washington State followed the guidance exactly. At least one state did investment justifications and then built their enhancement plan (reversed engineered?) from the investment justifications. This will be an issue when they go back to try and build FFY07 and their enhancement justifications don't reflect a multi-year strategy.

There was little cross (Inter) panel communications. It actually helped to protect the process. People protected the information that each panel had on the states and UASIs. Jurisdictions who wrote broad general statements and did not provide specifics got low scores. The failure to tie everything together was clear to the reviewers.

No weighting has been given to the peer review process. Need and risk are other factors that have to be added in by DHS. How that plays out is still to be seen. It may be (just a guess) that monetary awards will be based on a percentage split of 70% on risk and 30% need or 60/40 on the applications put forth.

We will receive copies of the comments back on our State and UASI applications. Still on track to get the award on/before June 2, 2006.

The prognosis for FFY07 process is still unknown. Feedback was provided to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) on the process, and hopefully the process will only be tweaked and not totally revised.